

socialist review

Issue 33

For a democratic and socialist alternative

December 2010

\$2



Pike River
Mine Safety

Neoliberalism
Ruling for the Rich

Europe
On Strike

WHERE WE STAND

Socialism

Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need. Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

Workers' Power

Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want. Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power - a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils. China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

Revolution Not Reformism

Despite the myth of parliamentary democracy, the structures of parliament, the army, the police and the judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class majority. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers. There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

Internationalism

Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

Liberation From Oppression

We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Maori,

Pacific Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class. We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence. All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

Tino Rangatiratanga

We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga. Maori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Maori. The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Maori elite while doing little for working class Maori. Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

Revolutionary Organisation

To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day-to-day activity in the mass organisations of the working class. We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions. We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

GET INVOLVED!

www.iso.org.nz

Dunedin

Meets every Thursday @ 7.30pm

Otago Room, Clubs & Societies Building,
84 Albany Street

Ph: 027 606 9549

Rest of Aotearoa

contact@iso.org.nz

Australia

Socialist Alternative: www.sa.org.au

CONTENTS

4 THE FIRE LAST TIME

1968 - 1977: The Fire Last Time

6 NEOLIBERALISM

Ruling for the Rich

8 WIKILEAKS

Wikileaks exposes a rotten system

The Bolsheviks and the fight against "capitalist diplomacy"

10 EUROPE ON STRIKE

Celtic Tiger out of luck

13 PIKE RIVER

Former Pike River Coal miner hits out at lack of mine safety

14 RACISM AND REAL NEW ZEALANDERS

16 MARXISM AND THE NATURAL WORLD

17 THEORY

Why we need to get organised

18 REVIEWS:

Call of Duty: Black Ops

John Lennon

If blood be the price of your cursed coal by God we've paid enough

The loss of 21 lives at the Pike River coal mine is a tragedy that never needed to happen.

But while we mourn alongside the miners, there are also reasons to get angry. Because, contrary to what the media and government would have you believe, not everybody in this country does stand in solidarity with those miners. The people in charge of that mine, its CEO and its corporate executives have no right to cast themselves as victims of this disaster. They grew rich on the blood and sweat of people like those who died in the Pike river mine. They used the power to take away the miners jobs and to effectively force them to accept working conditions that were dangerous and deadly. They knew about the risks, they knew how they could be avoided and did nothing about them for the sake of their profits. These people, who now appear in the media with their heads hung in grief, have nothing in common with the men whose lives they destroyed. These bosses are not heroes, victims or leaders, they can rightly be described as social parasites; growing rich and bloated from profits earned by the sacrifices of their

workers.

So despite all John Key's rhetoric about unity in the midst of disaster, the truth remains that even in the midst of this national tragedy, New Zealand is a divided nation. The question becomes, how do these social parasites get away it? The answer is that these people have the government, the media and the economic system at their disposal and, with all this power; they manufacture ideas that are designed to prevent people from identifying their oppressors. There are many examples of such ideas; racism is one of them and you will read about it in this magazine. The one thing such ideas have common in the context of a capitalist society is that they trick the workers into bullying each other, leaving the bosses free to exploit the working class. Workers are exploited by a ruling class, a class of bosses irrespective of their race, colour, religion or nationality. In order to fight back, workers need to stop pointing their fingers at each other, and start pointing at the ones in power.

However, workers everywhere can see the truth. Throughout Europe working class people are taking to the streets to protest cut backs to government spending. We are told by

governments and businesses that this is a recession and we all have to make sacrifices, but we can all see that ordinary people, who had nothing to do with causing the recession are the ones who suffer, while the wealthy carry on as they always have.

Cutbacks on safety, cutbacks on welfare – they are all part of the same agenda. The bosses agenda. But there is an alternative to simply watching the tragedy unfold around us. We can fight back. As workers in Europe fight back in their tens of millions, 30,000 young workers and students in London decided to stand up. When their union capitulated to the government they didn't back down. Instead they battled the police in Parliament Square. They mightn't have won yet, but 30,000 radicals is a good place to start a fight back.

In New Zealand, it was among West Coast miners that the union movement began, more than 100 years ago. They led the way campaigning for better conditions. Here, as in Europe, there is an alternative to crisis and cutbacks. We too can fight.

Vincent Anthony

Cover image courtesy of Jeromy Osbourne / DeviantArt

Subscribe to Socialist Review

Aotearoa \$5

Solidarity \$15

International \$20



- ☐ I'd like to subscribe to Socialist Review
- ☐ I'd like to support the socialist press.
Sign me up for a solidarity subscription.
- ☐ This is just what I've been looking for!
Please send me membership details.

Fill out the form and post to:

Socialist Review, PO Box 6157, Dunedin.

Please make cheques out to the International Socialist Organisation

Name

Address

Email

Socialist Review will be sent free to prisoners on request

1968 - 1977: The Fire Last Time

The 60s and 70s were rocked by mass protests and uprisings throughout the world. New Zealand was no exception. Everyone knows of the giant movement against the Vietnam War, the rise of movements against racism – the movements for tino rangitiratanga and against apartheid in South Africa, and the women's liberation movement. What is less often mentioned in the centrality of working class political activism to these protests. The 60s and 70s saw several strike waves, including here in New Zealand. Brian Roper has examined the period.

From 1957 until 1969 labour productivity grew much faster than real wages, while the share of national income going to wage and salary earners steadily declined: "The failure of real wages to keep pace with the rise in real GDP, the growing willingness of unions to press their claims outside the formal machinery of conciliation and arbitration, and the prevalence of labour shortages (which forced employers to bid up wage rates) inevitably created the conditions in which a rapid and widespread rise in nominal wages could occur, given the necessary trigger" (Boston, 1984, p.90).

This trigger came in the form of the infamous Nil General Wage Order (GWO) of the Arbitration Court issued on the 18th of June 1968. Given that the rate of inflation was 4.9%, the Nil GWO constituted a 4.9% wage cut. It shattered the confidence of the labour movement in the Arbitration Court and outraged the rank and file, bringing to an end the quiescence of the rank and file of the labour movement which had been the hallmark of industrial relations in the years following the defeat of the militant wing of the union movement in the 1951 Waterfront Lockout. As Boston observes, "the nil-wage order had four immediate effects: it shattered the

labour movement's confidence in the Court as an honest broker in the industrial relations arena; it sparked a wave of protest action; it further encouraged the move towards direct negotiations between employers and employees; and it eventually prompted a new approach to the Court by the FOL (Federation of Labour, equivalent to the CTU nowadays) and the Employers Federation" (1984: 91). Rank and file workers and their shop-floor delegates considered that they had not received a 'fair share' of the economic prosperity of the 1960s. Consequently they were no longer prepared to be shackled by the centralized system of wage bargaining nor misrepresented by a trade union bureaucracy that was more concerned with maintaining its own privileged position in that system than with organizing and advancing the struggle for higher real wages and better conditions of employment.

In the autumn of 1969 the pressures that had been slowly building during the 1960s, exploded in a strike wave of historically unprecedented proportions. The industrial action started in the Auckland area but it was soon generalized throughout the country as 110,096 workers, representing 12% of the total workforce, pressed their claims.

This strike wave was the beginning of the most significant upturn in the level of working class struggle in New Zealand's history. The strike waves of 1969-1970, 1973 and 1976-77 were driven from below. The rank and file militancy of workers, reinforced by the experience of successful actions taken in the recent past, fuelled these strikes. The strength of the union movement is indicated by the fact that real weekly earnings increased 0.3% in the year to April 1969, 2.2% to April 1970, 8.4% to April 1971, 4.9% to April 1972 and 5.1% to April 1973. Workers newly awakened awareness of their collective strength and confidence in their

ability to struggle and win transformed the political environment, contributing, among other things, to the defeat of the National Government in the 1972 election.

Bosses back compulsory unionism

The response of the Employers Federation (NZEF) to this upsurge of working class struggle is interesting. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the balance of power favoured the trade union movement, it supported centralized wage bargaining and compulsory unionism. Voluntary unionism was opposed on the grounds that it would enhance the influence of militants within the labour movement: "with voluntary union membership, the size of the largest and most moderate unions would fall, giving the smaller and more militant unions a disproportionate voice in trade union movement policy making". At the same time "abolition of compulsory unionism would likely see an increase in wildcat stoppages, especially at strategic points in industry" and, while the militant unions would have no trouble establishing closed shops, the "moderate" unions would experience declining membership and influence within the labour movement.

Rank and file workers were successfully achieving major concessions from individual employers at the level of the workplace and/or firm – either through actual industrial action or at least through the very real threat of it. Employer solidarity was at an all time low. The historical corollary of working class confidence, unity and strength was, at that time, a lack of confidence, disunity and a self-perception of industrial weakness

amongst employers. Thus the NZEF had little choice but to push for increased government intervention to provide a greater degree of centralization than would otherwise have been possible and to enhance the influence of the "moderate" trade union bureaucracy within the labour movement.

Unions defeat the government

The third National government under the leadership of the conservative populist Robert Muldoon was swept to power at the 1975 election. A central element of the National Party's platform was a pledge to reduce the power of the union movement. This was to be achieved through the introduction of secret ballots on the question of voluntary unionism, stiffer penalties for "illegal" strikes, provision for the Industrial Commission to order a resumption of



"Piggy" Muldoon: Prime Minister from 1975 to 1984, Robert Muldoon, tried in vain to hold back the rising tide of workers struggles with wage and price freezes. He clung to power by dividing the country, most famously in the 1981 Springbok Tour.

FIRE LAST TIME

work in the public interest, the outlawing of political strikes, and to provide jurisdiction to the civil courts over industrial relations matters.

The union movement responded with waves of protest action from 1976 to 1977. In 1976, the total number of workers (201,085) and the fraction of the workforce (19.3%) involved in strike action peaked at the highest level reached in the twentieth century. The immediate focus of these struggles was the attempt by the Government to introduce a statutory incomes policy (a twelve-month wage freeze was imposed in May 1976), which was intended to control nominal wage growth and reduce inflation.

The trade union movement placed the Government under tremendous pressure. Once it became clear that the union movement was united and determined to oppose the wage freeze, the Government decided to beat a tactical retreat.

The Government was forced to make a number of important concessions to the trade union movement. Central among these was the inclusion of an "exceptional circumstances" clause into the regulations governing the wage freeze. In effect, this clause enabled the Industrial Commission to grant wage increases where joint submissions were made by both workers' and employers' representatives. At first, recognizing the broader implications of making joint-submissions, the Employers' Federation refused to budge. The union movement responded with a vigorous campaign of industrial action and by year's end, the employers had capitulated.

The lasting impact

The strikes waves from 1968 to 1977 were central to a major upturn in working class struggle. This upturn in struggle corresponded to, and was influenced by, a similar international upturn in working class struggle exemplified by May '68 in France, the Long Hot Autumn of 1969 in Italy, and the British union movement's defeat of the Conservative Government in 1974.

The most important characteristic of the strikes during this time is the simple fact that workers were winning. As workers successfully won wage increases and better conditions of employment through strike action, this fuelled the confidence and militancy of rank and file union members. The strike waves during the 1970s were driven from below. Many were wildcat strikes initiated by the rank and file without official sanction by trade union bureaucrats. The militancy of the union movement is highlighted by the response of thousands of Auckland workers to the gaoling of Bill Andersen, then secretary of the Northern Drivers Union, on the 1st of July 1974; "on the following day thousands of ... workers ceased to work and converged on the Supreme Court were Andersen was due appear". This kind of largely spontaneous industrial and political action by workers was common during this period, even if it often took place on a smaller scale.

The upsurge in working class struggle, student political activism, and the rise of progressive social movements that generated a significant leftward shift in New Zealand politics. First, the struggles of the workers' movement and the various social movements during this period

Right: Poster commemorating the occupation of Bastion Point. In 1977, Maori activists asserted the claim of Ngati Whatua to Bastion Point in Auckland. The trade unions responded to their call for support by putting a "green ban" on the point and calling on all workers to refuse to work on any developments. At every stage, a confident working class movement buoyed up, and was strengthened by, movements for liberation.

rocked the conservative establishment, composed of company directors, National cabinet ministers, and bureaucrats, which had ruled the country without challenge from 1951 to 1967. After 1968 both employers and successive governments were forced onto the back foot; they struggled to contain the growing pressure from below and to reconstruct and reassert the hegemony of the right.

Wide layers of people absorbed the belief that the world could be changed for the better. In this respect, the polity as a whole was permeated by the ideologies and politics of the left. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the left was dominant, but it was confident, militant, active, organized and powerful, and it enjoyed a significant degree of popular support.

The turbulence of the 1970s highlights the transitory nature of ideology and politics. It suggests that the current dominance of neoliberalism is historically contingent and rests on a changing balance of social forces, however much it may superficially appear to be permanent and unchangeable. Another major upsurge in working class struggle, on the scale that we saw during the 1970s, could transform New Zealand's political environment in the future.

Learning from the Past

What are the lessons of the strikes, protests, campaigns and movements of the 1970s for our involvement in shaping the future? First, the history of the 1970s highlights the importance of being involved in struggles and campaigns outside the realm of parliamentary politics. The progressive political change that was brought about as a result of the struggles of the 1970s was achieved because large numbers of predominately working class people got involved in pushing for change from below.

Second, it's vital to recognise the potential capacity that workers, organised in unions, have to take on employers and/or the government and win. As the union movement's victory in 1976-77 shows, the defeat in 1991 (when the Employment Contracts Act was introduced) was not inevitable but resulted from the treacherous sell out of the rank and file by the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) leadership. A prolonged general strike could, at the very least, have



forced the government to either amend or withdraw the legislation. Learning the lessons of the 1970s when workers won major victories, and the 1990s when they suffered major defeats, can help us prepare to fight and win in the future.

Finally, it's also vital to realise that none of the central issues that concerned the protest movements of the 1970s have diminished in importance. Today the world is characterised by war, large and growing gaps between rich and poor, women's oppression, racism, heterosexism, and mounting environmental problems. The world's rulers repeatedly portray free market capitalism and liberal democracy as the best possible way of organising advanced industrial societies economically and politically. Yet in this free world we are not really free and in this democracy we generally have no real influence over government. Therefore, the key message of the movements of the 1970s is more not less important today: another better world is both necessary and possible. Back in the 1970s protesters chanted: 'We shall fight and we shall win- London, Paris, Rome Berlin!' I think we can and should draw upon the inspiration provided by the struggles and movements of the 1970s, not to indulge in nostalgia for the past, but in order to make a better future.

Cory Anderson

Based on the article "The Fire Last Time: The Rise of Class Struggle and Progressive Social Movements in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1968 to 1977" by Dr Brian Roper.

Further Reading

Boston, J. (1984), *Incomes Policies in NZ: 1968-1984*, Wellington: Victoria University Press.
Roth, H. (1979), 'The Historical Framework', in Deeks, J., Roth, H., Farmer, J. and Scott, G., *Industrial Relations in New Zealand*, NZ: Methuen.
Pearce, G. (1986), 'Where is NZ Going?', PhD Thesis, Christchurch: University of Canterbury

Neoliberalism: ruling for the rich

At the core of National's neoliberal economic policy is a belief that capitalism is the only feasible and desirable mode of economic organisation known to humankind. National argues that what is good for business is good for everyone. They claim that if businesses invest more 'because they are profitable and feeling positive about the future', then the economy will grow at a faster rate and eventually everyone will be better off because incomes will be higher, employment security will be enhanced, and the government will be better placed to fund social services.

The evidence does not support this claim. Internationally and in New Zealand, neoliberalism has increased inequality, benefiting the 20% of the population on the highest incomes, especially the top 10%, while disadvantaging the rest, who have experienced either declines or else only very small rises in real income, higher user charges for public services, greater employment insecurity and debt.

Tax reform

The Government claims its tax package is 'broadly neutral in terms of income distribution' but this depends on broadening its tax base, especially from residential property and trusts. But if, for example, the army of lawyers and accountants employed by businesses and high-income earners to minimise their tax come up with new avoidance mechanisms, then the Government's tax package will increase inequality. It's clear that the increase in GST will impact most negatively on the third of New Zealanders on lowest incomes, while the top 20% will benefit the most from cuts to marginal income tax rates and the company tax rate. The benefits of tax cuts for businesses and the wealthy seldom trickle down and in fact generally generate upward flows of income and wealth.

Income inequality

An important study of trends in incomes, inequality and poverty conducted this year for the Ministry of Social Development shows income inequality increased substantially from 1982 to



Fat of the land: John Key and his government are committed to looking after the parasitic minority that is so well represented by Prince William

2004, declined from 2004 to 2007 'mainly as a result of the Working For Families package', and that 'remained much the same from 2007 to 2009'. In 2009, the top 10% received 25.7% of total disposable household income (but over 50% of net household wealth) and the top 20% received 40.4%, while the bottom 50% of the population received 28.5%. The two most common statistical measures of income inequality – the Gini coefficient and the P80/P20 ratio – demonstrate income inequality was substantially higher in 2009 than 1982. In 2004, New Zealand was the eighth most unequal out of 30 OECD (developed) countries. The child poverty rate increased substantially from 1982 to 1993, 'fell significantly from 1994 to 2007, but plateaued from 2007, settling at around the rate that prevailed in the early 1980s'. Taking housing costs into account, 25% of New Zealand children lived in relative poverty. Using this same measure, 18% of the population lived in low-income households in 2009 compared with 9% in 1984.

Wealth inequality

Income inequality is only one part of the picture. The distribution of wealth (the stock individuals build up during the course of their

lives) is generally more unequal. Reliable data is hard to find because the wealthy tend to disguise the full extent to avoid tax, but wealth inequality is clear from the statistics. The Household Savings Survey (HSS), conducted for the first time in 2001, shows the top 20% of the population over 18 years of age 'holds nearly 70% of [total] positive net worth. Of the \$366.978 billion of net worth for the population as a whole, the top 10% holds \$194.546 billion or 53.01%. A 2003-2004 Statistics New Zealand survey shows the top 1% owns 16.4% of total net worth, the top 5% owns 37.7%, and the top 10% owns 51.8%. In contrast, the bottom 50% of the population owns a mere 5.2%. Any rise in unemployment and downward pressure on wages is also likely to combine with the tax reforms to cause a small but sharp rise in overall inequality from 2008 to 2011.

Uneven impacts

Inequality impacts unevenly on women, men, and ethnicities. The rise and entrenchment of high levels of unemployment during the 1990s impacted most severely on Asian, Maori and Pacific peoples, but narrowed the pay gap between women and men because of the concentration of women in public sector

The Government assumes beneficiaries can be pushed or bribed into the labour market. But unemployment is generally caused by lack of demand for labour by employers.

RULING FOR THE RICH

occupations, such as nursing and teaching, which have strong unions and are not affected as quickly by economic downturns as private sector jobs (especially those in manufacturing, building and construction). Overall, National's policies and the recession will hit hardest Maori, Pacific peoples, and, to a lesser but significant extent, Pakeha women on low to middle incomes. If the Government is re-elected in 2011 and follows through on threats made in its 2003 Saving the Next Generation from Welfare Dependency document to introduce time limits for the main benefits, this will have a particularly harsh set of effects on these groups.

Welfare reform

The Government approach to welfare is wrong because it completely fails to acknowledge the long hours of unpaid work that parents receiving the DPB and other benefits perform. It assumes beneficiaries can be pushed or bribed into the labour market. But unemployment is generally caused by lack of demand for labour by employers due to a broad range of structural factors like profitability, present and future projections of sales, strength of demand and prices for export commodities in international markets, wage levels, fluctuations of output growth in the wider economy, labour-saving fixed capital investment, and so forth. Altering benefit rates relative to wages, narrowing access, work tests and time limits are unlikely to increase employment and reducing so-called dependency.

Neoliberalism fails

There has been a sharp reversal in the fortunes of neoliberalism. Supporters argued the recovery from 1999 to 2007 was proof neoliberalism brought growth and employment, but the 2008 recession has highlighted entrenched mass unemployment and the failure of neoliberalism to raise growth rates to anything like the post-war boom from 1945 to 1973. Even at the height of the recovery in June 2006 there were 79,000 officially unemployed and 132,200 jobless, compared with 12 people unemployed in 1950 and 19 in 1955. In June 2010, there were 159,000 people unemployed and 255,700 jobless. Although National's strategy may raise profits, leading to an increase in investment and output growth, the resulting growth rate is likely to be comparatively low.

Also, the neoliberal loosening of finance rules – here and overseas – was a major cause of the global financial crisis. Increased regulation and massive government-funded bank bailouts (like the South Canterbury Finance bailout) is a massive blow to neoliberalism.

Two things could cause a severe financial and economic crisis in New Zealand. First, New Zealand's large and ultimately unsustainable balance of payments deficits, which is due to historically high levels of foreign ownership of New Zealand businesses (profits and dividends flow offshore) and offshore private debt. Second, in March 2010, New Zealand's net international liabilities were \$166.7 billion (88.9% of GDP) and New Zealand was one of the five most highly indebted countries in the OECD. By 2010, three of the five (Greece, Iceland and Spain) had



Earlier this year the National Government changed the Holidays Act and Employment Relations Act to drastically change employment law in New Zealand. The changes are designed to take away workers' rights, remove protections, cut pay, reduce holidays and diminish access to sick leave. Specifically, the legislation aims to extend the 90 day trial to all employers, make it more difficult for union organisers to access workplaces, allow employers to exercise undue influence over their workers during bargaining, remove reinstatement as a primary remedy so that employers can sack workers knowing that even if it is proven to be unfair dismal they will not have to re-employ them, 'allow' workers to 'sell' the 4th week of statutory annual leave- this opens the door for employers to pressure their workers to take only three weeks annual leave. NZCTU called a national day of action to fight against these changes, leading to the largest union demonstrations in almost 20 years. But this is just one part of a broad range of attacks on workers, welfare beneficiaries and students. This National Government is a government ruling for the rich. As Bill English stated in the 2009 Budget: The Government aims "to create a more business-friendly environment in New Zealand". As the current struggles in France show, we can fight and we can win. But in order to win we have to be organised, we need to mobilise large numbers of people in our workplaces, our communities, and on the campuses. We have to recognise that we are many and they are few. We have to be prepared to strike, protest, rally and march. We cannot rely on Labour or the Greens to defeat this government - only the great mass of working class people outside of parliament can do this.

had major financial crises. This makes New Zealand vulnerable to capital flight and a severe financial crisis.

Conclusion: Where to from here?

Historical materialism places current events in historical contexts. Since 1935 New Zealand's political history has been dominated by Keynesianism (state intervention in the economy) from 1935 to 1974, crisis of the Keynesian welfare state from 1975 to 1984, and neoliberalism from 1984 to the present. Neither the 1999 nor the 2008 elections constitute major turning points in New Zealand's political history because neither the Fifth Labour Government nor the Fifth National Government changed the overall neoliberal agenda (although Labour did 'roll back' some parts of neoliberalism and National responded to the recession with a Keynesian-type government intervention).

Overall, National is committed to retaining and extending the neoliberal policy regime. The future will depend on how well the economy recovers from the recession and whether or not New Zealand can avoid a major financial crisis. But any improvement will crucially depend on the level of working class and social movement struggle in New Zealand and internationally. In the absence of a major upsurge in working class and social movements, neoliberalism is likely to remain firmly in place. However, if there is such an upsurge, then alternatives to neoliberalism will come to the forefront of New Zealand politics.

Mike Tait

Based on the article "The Fifth National Government's Neoliberal Policy Agenda: Securing a Brighter Future?" by Dr Brian Roper.

Wikileaks exposes a rotten system

The Wikileaks cables, and the extraordinary witch-hunt leading to the arrest of Julian Assange, have exposed a system built on lies and hypocrisy. The whole democratic facade of the "free world" lies in tatters, next to the handshakes and carefully manufactured phrases of official diplomacy. In their place are revealed the sordid dealings and real opinions of our politicians and public servants, speaking as we've never heard them before – honestly.

It is true that the Wikileaks cables have not told us much we did not already know. But it is one thing to "know" that the imperialist powers dominate and carve up the world between them with no regard for the opinions or lives of the world's population. It is quite another to have it confirmed by the functionaries of imperialism themselves. Everything which previously could be dismissed or ignored as the cynical theories of the left now must be confronted as embarrassing facts.

It is one thing to know that most of the Arab states are thoroughly reactionary regimes and staunch allies of the United States and Israel. It is quite another to hear directly that Saudi Arabia's King repeatedly urged the bombing of Iran and that the Saudi foreign minister proposed an "Arab army" with US "naval and air support" to destroy Hezbollah in Lebanon, apparently with the support of the Siniora Lebanese Government.

Some, including Israel, are celebrating these revelations as showing that the whole world, even the Arab world, wants to take military action against Iran. In fact, they show the opposite. The very fact that these opinions have been kept secret demonstrates just how unpopular they are in the Arab countries, where the mass of the population rightly hate Israel and the US. And yet, like everywhere else, the super-rich ruling class of Saudi Arabia rules only for itself, forging friendly ties with the mass murderers of world imperialism, all the better to oppress and exploit their own people.

This lies at the heart of what Wikileaks has revealed about our world. Leon Trotsky wrote in 1917 that "secret diplomacy is a necessary tool for a propertied minority which is compelled to deceive the majority in order to subject it to its interests." The revolutionary Bolshevik government published all the secret treaties of Russian imperialism, because "the abolition of secret diplomacy is the primary condition for an

honest, popular, truly democratic foreign policy".

This is why Wikileaks has provoked such a hysterical reaction and witch-hunt from the establishment. Not so much because of the particular details revealed in the cables, but because our rulers are simply appalled at the idea that common people should have any right to see how the world is really run, and in whose interests.

All of their international dealings, including wars which have cost the lives of millions, are based on lies. So how are they to do business in the future, how are they to organise another Iraq war, if their back-room honesty constantly finds its way out to the pesky public?

That is why the extraordinary attacks on Julian Assange and Wikileaks have actually revealed more about our society than the leaks themselves. The hypocrisy of the "democratic" world has been mind-blowing. On 7 December, the US Department of State issued a press release titled "US to Host World Press Freedom Day in 2011". Without a hint of irony or embarrassment, it proclaimed:

New media has empowered citizens around the world to report on their circumstances, express opinions on world events, and exchange information in environments sometimes hostile to such exercises of individuals' right to freedom of expression.

At the same time, we are concerned about the determination of some governments to censor and silence individuals, and to restrict the free flow of information. We mark events such as World Press Freedom Day in the context of our enduring commitment to support and expand press freedom and the free flow of information in this digital age.

On the very same day, Assange was arrested and denied bail in London. Leading US political figures are calling for him to be hunted down like Al-Qaeda and executed, and the US Administration is pulling out all stops to shut down Wikileaks. They are now even targeting the *New York Times* for investigation. How quickly democratic ideals are abandoned when they threaten the powers-that-be!

Big business predictably turned on Wikileaks in a heartbeat. It took just one phone call from Democrat senator Joe Lieberman for Amazon to kick Wikileaks off its servers. This is despite proclaiming on its website its support for organisations which "fight censorship and defend imprisoned and persecuted writers around the world in the belief that freedom of expression is an essential component of every healthy society".

Visa, MasterCard and PayPal were just a step behind, preventing people from sending money to

support Wikileaks. Nevertheless, if you wish to donate to the white supremacist Ku Klux Klan, Visa and MasterCard are still happy to facilitate this transaction.

Assange is now facing charges of sexual assault. We do not know what happened between Assange and the two women concerned. But without a doubt the entire farcical process has been politically motivated; the US and Sweden have barely concealed the fact that they see the sexual assault case merely as a way to get Assange silenced behind bars and then extradited to the US to face trumped-up espionage charges in the land of rendition, torture and the death penalty. In a case of classic British understatement, Assange's lawyer described the whole thing as "highly unusual".

The claim that Wikileaks has "endangered countless lives" should be treated with nothing but contempt, coming as it does from the same people who have actually taken "countless" lives in Afghanistan and Iraq. If a few spies, diplomats and collaborators have now been exposed for the crimes they have committed doing the dirty work of US and Australian imperialism, then all the better. If Gillard or Clinton really cared about their or anyone else's lives, they would stop playing the dirty game of world domination and get out of Afghanistan.

Karl Marx characterised the world's capitalists as a "band of hostile brothers". The Wikileaks saga confirms this view. Each country's

Karl Marx characterised the world's capitalists as a "band of hostile brothers". The Wikileaks saga confirms this view. Each country's capitalists and the state machines that represent them manoeuvre and compete for profit and dominance in the world, sometimes escalating into all-out war.

capitalists and the state machines that represent them manoeuvre and compete for profit and dominance in the world, sometimes escalating into all-out war. The major powers dominate not just through their own economic and military power, but also through shifting networks of alliances, as they try to contain their rivals.

But they also all have something in common – all their profits and power rely on the subordination of their

own working populations. They all depend upon secrecy and lies, a thin veneer of "freedom" and "democracy", in order to conceal the class divide at the heart of the exploitative system. And so they all unite to destroy someone like Julian Assange. He must be defended.

The struggle to defend Wikileaks must move from the internet to the streets. More than this, the system Assange has helped to expose must be brought down. A genuine democracy must be put in its place. This can only be achieved by ripping the economic and political power out of the hands of the lying parasites who occupy the parliaments, Pentagons and palaces.

Josh Lees (Socialist Alternative)

The Bolsheviks and the fight against "capitalist diplomacy"

The release of thousands of US embassy cables by Wikileaks is not the first time secret diplomatic communications have been let out en masse.

One of the first acts of the Bolsheviks after the 1917 October revolution in Russia was to publish all of the secret treaties entered into by the Tsarist government and by the pro-capitalist provisional government that ruled between February and October 1917.

These treaties detailed, among other things, how colonies and state boundaries would be redrawn after the war, and revealed a great discrepancy between what nations told their citizens and the agreements they made with other powers.

The Bolsheviks, particularly Leon Trotsky who headed the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, saw this as crucial in establishing a genuinely democratic republic.

The public release of these treaties, and Trotsky's statement justifying their publication, was greeted by the establishment with the same fear and rage directed at Wikileaks by today's rulers of the world.

We reprint Trotsky's statement, which more than stands the test of time as a compelling indictment of the system of capitalist diplomacy.



No secret diplomacy: Russian revolutionary leaders Leon Trotsky (second from left) and Adolf Joffe (right) led the negotiations that ended war between the new workers government and Imperial Germany. One of the first acts of the revolutionaries was to publish all the secret agreements of the British, French and Tsarist governments, exposing the predatory nature of World War One. The Germans forced a humiliating treaty on the revolutionaries, annexing much of Ukraine but within a year, German worker and soldiers, inspired by the Russian example, had overthrown the Kaiser's government.

ON THE PUBLICATION OF THE SECRET TREATIES

Leon Trotsky, November 22 1917

In publishing the secret diplomatic documents from the foreign policy archives of Tsarism and of the bourgeois coalition Governments of the first seven months of the revolution, we are carrying out the undertaking which we made when our party was in opposition. Secret diplomacy is a necessary tool for a propertied minority which is compelled to deceive the majority in order to subject it to its interests. Imperialism, with its dark plans of conquest and its robber alliances and deals, developed the system of secret diplomacy to the highest level. The struggle against the imperialism which is exhausting and destroying the peoples of Europe is at the same time a struggle against capitalist diplomacy, which has cause enough to fear the light of day. The Russian people, and the peoples of Europe and the whole world, should learn the documentary truth about the plans forged in secret by the financiers and industrialists together with their parliamentary and diplomatic agents. The peoples of Europe have paid for the right to this truth with countless sacrifices and universal economic desolation.

The abolition of secret diplomacy is the primary condition for an honest, popular, truly democratic foreign policy. The Soviet Government regards it as its duty to carry out such a policy in practice. That is precisely why, while openly proposing an immediate armistice to all the belligerent peoples and their Governments, we are at the same time publishing these treaties and agreements, which have lost all binding force for the Russian workers, soldiers, and peasants who have taken power into their own hands.

The bourgeois politicians and journalists of Germany and Austria-Hungary may try to make use of the documents published in order to present the diplomacy of the Central Empires in a more advantageous light. But any such attempt would be doomed to pitiful failure, and that for two reasons. In the first place, we intend quickly to place before the tribunal of public opinion secret documents which treat sufficiently clearly of the diplomacy of the Central Empires. Secondly, and more important, the methods of secret diplomacy are as universal as imperialist robbery. When the German proletariat enters the revolutionary path leading to the secrets of their chancelleries, they will extract documents no whit inferior to those which we are about to publish. It only remains to hope that this will take place quickly.

The workers' and peasants' Government abolishes secret diplomacy and its intrigues, codes, and lies. We have nothing to hide. Our program expresses the ardent wishes of millions of workers, soldiers, and peasants. We want the rule of capital to be overthrown as soon as possible. In exposing to the entire world the work of the ruling classes, as expressed in the secret diplomatic documents, we address the workers with the call which forms the unchangeable foundation of our foreign policy: "Proletarians of all countries, unite."



Continued from back Page...

Before the protests had even finished the tidal wave rolled on to Europe's oldest republic, a centre of working class resistance with a long tradition of militant protest:

France. Protests began as the conservative government, headed by Nicholas Sarkozy, attempted to distract popular anger at austerity by victimising minorities. Members of France's Roma minority, victimised along with Jewish people by Hitler in the Holocaust, were forcibly deported in their thousands in August, despite EU and international law. Street protests against deportation were held drawing over 100,000 people and forcing prominent European leaders to denounce Sarkozy's racist policy.

Not content with victimizing the Roma, Sarkozy and his cronies aimed their fire at another minority: Muslim women. The introduction of a bill to ban wearing the veil in public was nothing more than an attempt to divide the left and present the French state as a defender of freedom and 'secularism'.

But Sarkozy's distraction tactics failed to work and the protests against the deportation of the Roma and the burqa ban were only a prelude. When the French government announced a plan to raise the retirement age – making pensions less available – a wave of strikes and protests

engulfed France. Oil workers struck and blockaded refineries, ensuring that threatening to starve the French economy of fuel. Strikes by transport workers and blockades by protesters at toll points, bridges and airports paralysed the transportation system. So far, 8 national days of action have been held, including on October 12th and 19th, when 3.5 million people took to the streets against the proposed changes. High school students (who have a long tradition of militancy in France) took up the cause as their own, occupying and blockading over 700 secondary schools. The whole movement has echoes of 2006, when French workers and students took on laws designed to increase job insecurity and won. Strikes and protests have continued since pension reform was passed into law on October 28th. The 2006 laws, significantly, were only defeated after they were passed, so victory may yet be within the grasp of French workers.

London, Paris, Rome, Berlin...

The wave of strikes and protests across Europe has occurred as workers have moved into action to defend their living standards against governments demanding austerity – cuts to pensions, education, services and public sector jobs. So far, governments have mostly gotten their way, despite massive opposition. But this hasn't always been the case. By taking militant

action, French workers were able to force the repeal of anti-worker laws in 2006, and defeated a neo-liberal austerity package again in 2008. The current struggles have spread like a wildfire from country to country because they are all fighting much the same thing. If any one of these struggles wins, it will inspire all the others. Workers would defeat their bosses in country after country, and will be motivated to fight for real gains: higher wages, better social security, a

more liberal and a freer society. The decades-long domination of the right and their neoliberal policies would be ended.

That's why the police came down on the radicals in Dublin so hard. They could not risk the radicals winning.

But all the police forces in the world are not invincible. Just days after the police rioted in Dublin, 50,000 students descended on the headquarters of Britain's Conservative Party in London, protesting rising University fees. The police could do little more than stand by as thousands of students smashed their way into the building, forcing the Tories to evacuate with many protesters remaining on the roof hours later. As workers and students everywhere become more organised to fight back against their ruling classes, an old slogan from the struggles in the 1960s and 70s is being dusted off once more – London, Paris, Rome, Berlin: We will fight, we will win!

Cory Anderson

The whole movement has echoes of 2006, when French workers and students took on laws designed to increase job insecurity and won.

Celtic Tiger out of luck

"I believe over the next three weeks there are three things we have to do. There is a budget, the four-year plan and to bring stability to our own fiscal situation and try and pray that this is the end of it."
– Irish Minister for Social Protection Éamon Ó Cuív, offering sound advice for the tens of thousands of Irish workers who are set to lose their livelihoods in Ireland's economic crash.

Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" – a housing-boom and minimal corporate-tax driven era of neoliberal economic expansion – has not delivered a new era of progress and plenty as was often promised by Ireland's political class. Two years after Ireland's economic crash, the promise that rich capitalists getting even more grotesquely richer would somehow benefit the working class has turned into dust and ashes.

Housing complexes built with cheap credit haunt the landscapes of Ireland's cities, the banks that advanced the money are now mostly bust. Three hundred thousand empty apartments and flats lie in these complexes. Outside, their former residents hunker for warmth and support in hostels, and in some cases charity-donated sleeping bags on the streets.

Now, the future only promises to grow bleaker. After two years of recession and austerity budgets implemented by the governing Fianna Fail/Greens coalition, Ireland's misery has been compounded with a €85 billion bailout package from the European Union and IMF. This comes alongside further cuts to wages, jobs and public spending.

The Celtic Tiger

Ireland's last recession – in the 1980s – spurred a raft of economic policies aimed at making the country a haven for the world's corporate elite. One of the lowest corporate tax rates in the developed world, coupled with low paid but educated labour force, led to an annual growth rate of 6.5 per cent from 1989 until 2006.

By the early 2000s new wealth and cheap credit had led to a mass increase in property speculation, and an increasingly construction-centric economy. In a process similar to America's subprime crisis, when the bubble created by speculation and cheap credit burst three years ago, the consequences for the Irish working class are dire.

In October 2008 the Irish government bailed out the big Irish banks, going further than most other developed economies by guaranteeing the transactions of the banks. The Fianna-Fail/Greens coalition government predicted that it would spend \$US60 billion to bail out the banks in a country with an economy that has an annual GDP of \$US228 billion.

This necessitated a series of austerity budgets as the whirlpool of bad debt surrounding Ireland's banks increasingly threatened to send the Irish state down the path of bankruptcy. The true nature of the toxic debts held by the Irish banks is revealed by the fact that the largest

financial institution in Ireland today is not one of the country's banks or investment houses, but Paddy Power, a betting agency.

Bailout

In response to this dire economic situation comes the bailout. This is a plan to ensure that social spending and wages are cut. It is a response to the fear that capitalists Europe-wide share that the crisis of Ireland's banks and state may spread and infect the Eurozone.

Last weekend Fianna Fail, the European Union and the IMF agreed to the terms of a €85 billion bailout. Of this, €10 billion will be used immediately to shore up the Irish banks and €25 billion will be contributed to a contingency fund. The remaining amount will be spent to ensure that the Irish state can continue to fund its everyday operations. The last thing Ireland evidently would need is a cut to the police budget, or a reduction in parliamentary salaries.

Of course capitalists never simply hand over a blank cheque, even to other capitalists, which is why there has been such outrage in Ireland about the bailout. Not only will the working class endure cuts, but they can fully expect to be paying the cost of the bailout themselves.

Alongside the bailout the Irish Taoiseach (equivalent to Prime Minister) Brian Cowen has unveiled "The National Recovery Plan", one of the most severe austerity measures seen in Europe since the Second World War.

The EU ministers insisted that to receive the bailout the government would have to raid its national pension fund as well as its cash reserves for €17.5 billion as a condition of the deal. It remains an open question whether Ireland will even be able to afford to pay the interest on the loans which will average 5.8 per cent, leading the repayments totalling approximately 20 per cent of annual tax revenue.

Under the plan social welfare will be cut by €2.8 billion; health, education and agriculture will see a combined slashing of €3 billion. Six thousand jobs will be lost on account of these cuts in the health sector alone. Fees for university will rise massively, alongside a 5 per cent reduction in schools funding.

Not only are social services being slashed, but the government is also preparing for an all-out offensive against the working conditions of Irish labour. The minimum wage is set to be reduced by 12 per cent. And 13,200 jobs will be cut in the public sector by 2014, compounding the loss that has already occurred since 2008 of 12,000 jobs.

These examples do not even scratch the

surface of the breadth and depth of these cuts. But perhaps most starkly offensive of all is the fact that income tax will be raised for low-income earners. However the corporate tax rate will remain at an outrageously low 12.5 per cent.

The government plan to implement austerity stated that: "A low rate of corporation tax on export-oriented activity has been a cornerstone of our industrial policy since the 1950s, and the 12.5 per cent rate is now part of our international 'brand'." The document affirmed that corporation tax would "not be increased under any circumstances."

Backlash

Unsurprisingly, there has been a backlash against Fianna Fail and the EU amongst the Irish public. Even if the bailout is successful in staving off collapse, the vast bulk of the Irish population face serious social disintegration as a result of the capitalist offensive.

The austerity measures come at a time when the official unemployment rate is already standing at 13 per cent, and by some predictions 100,000 people are likely to emigrate from Ireland over the next two years, most of them graduate students and skilled labour.

Seething resentment has already been seen at a parliamentary level. The Green party have tried to distance themselves from the Cowen administration that they enabled, and a recent by-election means that Fianna Fail maintains government only with the support of two tempestuous independents.

Public attitudes towards the government are best summarised by a recent headline in the mass-selling newspaper the Irish Daily Star, which stated above a picture of the Fianna Fail ministry: "Useless Gobshites".

A recent by-election in Donegal South-West was illustrative of the anti-government feeling, with Sinn Féin candidate Pearse Doherty drubbing Fianna Fail in a seat they had held since the party's formation. Running on an anti-bailout platform, Doherty himself claimed that his victory was primarily a statement to Cowen to "get out of office".

However, the limits of parliamentary politics in resisting austerity are already making themselves clear. Elections are expected to be held early next year, but every indication is that this will not occur until after the austerity budget is passed. The Green party, while formally distancing themselves from Fianna Fail, have stated that they are willing to pass the austerity budget before an election is held.

The high pressure of the Irish ruling elite is being brought to bear upon the other major political parties as well, who hide a similar pro-austerity agenda behind their patriotic anti-EU and anti-Cowen rhetoric.

The main opposition party, Fine Gael, a right-wing party, has made statements implying opposition to the bailout. Party leader Endy Kenny stated that under his watch there would be a renegotiating of the deal. However, Fine Gael has agreed that there is a need for a program of

EUROPE ON STRIKE

cuts measuring €15 billion by 2014. Finance spokesperson Michael Noonan is on record saying the party is committed to the austerity plan. The Irish Labour party, a traditional coalition ally of Fine Gael, has made similar guarantees.

Most striking of all is the hypocrisy of Sinn Féin, which has pretensions to increase their presence within the Irish Republic. Happy to trade off anti-government feeling, Sinn Féin do so while obscuring the fact that they support the need to reduce spending. They have already done so in the North as part of the power-sharing agreement, differing only over the amount of time the cuts should be spread over.

A recent demonstration in Dublin shows the kind of response that will be needed if the Irish working class are not to suffer from the crisis of their capitalists. At least 100,000 people protested last weekend in one of the largest demonstrations that has ever occurred in the Irish Republic.

The mass mobilisation marched to the GPO, the site of the 1916 uprising against British colonial domination over Ireland. Explicit links were drawn between the struggle then and now, with many union and opposition figures drawing on a nationalist tradition of rebellion against foreign subjugation.

But the reality is that it is not primarily the European Union or foreign banks that have

caused this crisis. It was the self-conscious actions of the Irish ruling class themselves who set Ireland on the economic road to disaster.

The future of the struggle lies not with hypocritical politicians trading off discontent and misery for their own advantage. Nor does it lie in narrow-minded nationalism. It lies with the legacy of working class militants such as James Connolly, who argued that the only freedom Ireland would experience would come as a result of overthrowing the shackles of exploitation by the Irish capitalists.

Liam Byrne (Socialist Alternative)

Teachers, unions and the struggle

When teachers took strike action in NZ on September 15 they once again demonstrated their leading role in the working class movement and, with that, the changing nature of class in capitalist society.

In the last 30 years, neo-liberal economic theory has been triumphant. By smashing the traditional strongholds of union militancy in the blue-collar working class – miners, railway workers, freezing workers etc, they were able to claim that the working class as such no longer existed. The decline in manufacturing relative to service industries in the first world was cited as proof that the old Marxist idea of a ruling class and a working class was a relic of the 19th century. The expansion of 'professional' jobs, like teachers, nurses, and technicians of all kinds was seen as the fulfilment of capitalism's promise to create a massive middle class.

But in the last decade in New Zealand, it has been the white-collar professionals – teachers and nurses – who have won above-average pay rises, through traditional working class strike action, through solidarity, not individual bargaining.



In one sense it is obvious – teachers work, often very hard, and create value, so of course they are workers. In another sense, though, most teachers would not see themselves as part of "the working class", and many manual workers think of teachers as middle-class professionals.

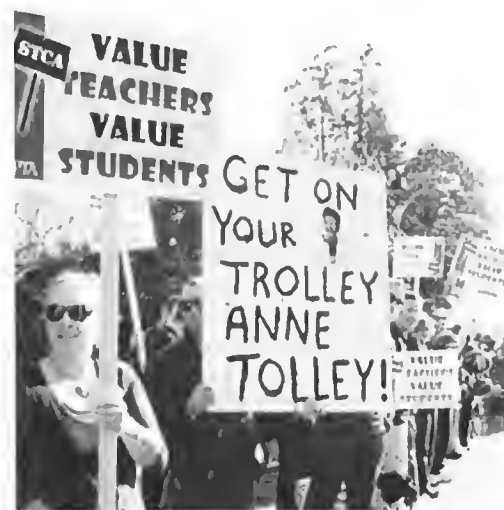
There are two elements at work – the objective reality of teachers' position in the economy and the subjective reality – the culture or consciousness of people. The objective reality is that teachers are no longer a privileged group. The mass expansion post war of public education created a demand for thousands of new teachers, which led in turn to the mass-production of education. This, coupled with the influx of women, who are routinely underpaid, into the profession, led to a decline in the 'proletarianisation' of the profession – wages and working conditions being held at a working class level. The reality of mass education also meant trade unions, solidarity and strike action were the best way to defend teachers pay and conditions, and more broadly, to defend education as a

profession.

However, culture and consciousness matter. Many teachers still see themselves as professionals and identify readily with real estate agents, doctors, lawyers and other professionals whose work is more often organised as small businesses, and who, being higher paid than other workers, are often able to buy rental properties or stocks and shares – capital, in short – which allows them to appropriate some of the wealth created by other workers, through rent or share dividends for example. So long as they identify subjectively with these groups, they are unable to effectively fight the real threats to their living standards, education, and to society in general.

Teachers occupy a strategic place in the economy and are the largest, best organised bloc in the working class. Their power is potentially enormous and pivotal. It's our job to build consciousness of the real class relations that hold us all back.

Mike Tait



Nelson secondary school teachers protest on Waimea Rd.

Former Pike River Coal miner hits out at lack of mine safety

Three weeks after a massive methane gas explosion tore through the Pike River Coal mine on the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island, the bodies of 29 men killed in the disaster are still trapped underground.

Recovery workers are using a jet-propelled GAG (Gornicz Agregat Gasniczy) machine to pump carbon dioxide into the mine in an effort to suppress a raging fire. Temperatures inside yesterday reached 600 degrees Celsius, and it could be weeks before it is safe to enter. Police have begun collecting DNA samples from family members of the 29 miners, which could be used to identify any remains that are eventually recovered.

Pike River Coal continues to insist that the mine was operated safely and to imply that the series of explosions, which began on November 19, was simply a random occurrence. Since the disaster, however, several mine experts, former miners and family members of those killed have spoken out about the unsafe conditions at the mine, including faulty ventilators, no back-up power generation system, inadequate methane drainage systems and no adequate monitoring of gas levels. Moreover, there were no plans in place to respond rapidly to an emergency; after the first explosion it took hours for emergency crews to reach the site.

Former Pike River employee Brent Forrester told TVNZ's "Sunday" program on December 5 that the explosion "was totally preventable". In an extensive interview, he said he was "very angry [and] upset" about the disaster, which had killed his close friend, contract worker Ricki Keane, and left "a lot of families, a lot of kids without dads". Forrester explained that he was speaking out because Keane would have done the same. "In these days and times mines don't blow up under professional guidance," he said, adding that there was "bad ventilation" and frequent gas build-ups at the mine.

Forrester rejected claims by Pike River Coal that the mine's methane gas levels were low. He noted that one of the dead miners, Conrad Adams, had sent text messages to a friend saying that "they were working in very low ventilation, he could smell hydrogen sulfide and the methane was going through the roof. It's the same thing as I was experiencing a year ago."

Forrester said the company had not installed methane sensors "anywhere up near the face where we were mining. If we had a gas problem and it [methane gas] was in the explosive range, the control wouldn't even read that probably [until] 15, 20 minutes later. Often sensors weren't calibrated or they'd shut down and you

just couldn't get them calibrated back in time."

He said the mine's fresh air base, a ventilated area where workers can shelter in the event of a gas build-up, was "1.5 kilometres from where we were working", and there was "no sufficient first aid gear". Forrester said he once helped organise a walkout of about 10 miners, including Ricki Keane, to protest the lack of basic emergency equipment, including stretchers and an emergency transport vehicle.

Forrester said workers were afraid to raise questions about safety because "there was pressure to get coal out and we were all, I suppose, in a little bit of fear of losing our jobs." He said that when workers reported safety concerns "it didn't seem like anything ever really got done about it", and there was "very much an 'us and them' relationship between management and workers".

Pike River had invested \$NZ300 million in the mine and was heavily in debt to its shareholders. It only began shipping coal to India this year—about 18 months behind its original planned schedule—and had raised just \$9 million. Forrester's comments are further evidence that the company compromised the safety of its workforce in order to extract the highly profitable coking coal as fast as possible.

Pike River CEO Peter Whittall brushed aside

Forrester's criticisms, telling TVNZ: "Gas had always been a hazard in this mine ... and nearly all the mines I've worked in." The position of the company, in other words, is that miners must accept the risk of injury or death as an unavoidable part of the job.

The interview with Forrester also exposes the role played by the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU), which nominally represents about 70 of Pike River's miners. Forrester explained that before organising the walkout he had telephoned an EPMU official and informed him of the workers' safety concerns. But following the explosion on November 19, EPMU national secretary Andrew Little told the New Zealand Herald that there was "nothing unusual about Pike River or this mine that we've been particularly concerned about." The union itself had not organised any industrial action at the mine.

Speaking to Radio New Zealand on Monday, Little made no mention of the mounting evidence that the mine was unsafe. Instead, he insisted that people should await the findings of the National Party government's Royal Commission of Inquiry before drawing any conclusions about the disaster: "We just don't know the facts. The possibilities are that there was management failure, there's the possibility that somebody underground had failed in some respect. There's

the possibility that there were natural forces beyond anybody's control, but we just don't know."

Workers should have no confidence in the government's Royal Commission, or in the investigations currently being undertaken by the police and the Department of Labour. From the outset, the government, the opposition Labour Party and the Greens—as well as the corporate media—have defended Pike River Coal and praised Whittall for his "leadership" during the failed rescue operation. Energy Minister Gerry Brownlee told Radio New Zealand last week that Pike River had "extensive" safety procedures and to suggest otherwise was "absurd". He said the Department of Labour had never raised any concerns about the mine.

Meanwhile, the fate of around 180 Pike River workers and contractors remains uncertain. The company has only agreed to pay its own staff until the end of the month, and has already laid off contractors. Pike River has vowed to reopen the mine—before the Royal Commission completes its investigation—but it is unlikely to be able to do so for several months. The company has already announced that it plans to reduce its workforce.

Some business analysts are predicting that Pike River will go into receivership. The company is insured for up to \$NZ100 million, but BusinessDay reported that "market sources" estimated it would need at least \$200 million to reopen the mine. The collapse of Pike River would devastate the remote West Coast, but even if the mine reopens it will undoubtedly come

under even greater pressure to cut costs at the expense of workers' conditions and safety.

The wife of one West Coast miner articulated the dilemma forced on families in the region, telling Radio New Zealand: "I desperately didn't want him to go down [in the mine] and I still don't really ... but there's not a huge amount of options around here for work."

Amid the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression, mining companies in advanced capitalist countries such as New Zealand are imposing conditions that differ little from those in rival Chinese mines, where more than 2,000 miners lose their lives each year. On Tuesday, a gas explosion killed 26 coal miners in China's Henan Province. The state-owned mine had been operating at night despite an order to halt production, according to a report in China's Global Times.

Tom Peters
reprinted from wsws.org

Racism and Real New Zealanders

Earlier this year broadcaster Paul Henry resigned from his job as host of TVNZ's "Breakfast" after his appallingly racist comments regarding Anand Satyanand.

The comment was compared with statements made by Maori Party MP Hone Harawira, including from his 2009 email: "White motherfuckers have been raping our lands and ripping us off for centuries, and all of a sudden you want me to play along with their puritanical bullshit." The right wing tried to compare these two attitudes.

To equate these two is fundamentally wrong. It's basically equating black power movements with white power. The big difference is that in New Zealand, and throughout the world, 'black' people are relatively powerless, while 'white' European and American men control vast sectors of the world.

Movements for so-called black power; and in Aotearoa particularly movements for tino rangatiratanga, may be racist but they are not racist. Racism emerged as an pseudo-scientific excuse for the slave trade. It is a farrago of lies designed to buttress the status quo. Black consciousness starts on the other hand from a recognition of the very real racial inequalities in society, and as such, for many people it is the first step toward political consciousness.

The liberal consensus of our 'bicultural' or multicultural society is that any discussion of race is off-limits. When Harawira wrote in a private email that "White motherfuckers have been raping our lands and ripping us off for centuries, and all of a sudden you want me to play along with their puritanical bullshit," it was greeted with howls of outrage.

Harawira was guilty, liberal commentators said, of playing the race card, in the same way Paul Henry was when he suggested Satyanand was not a real New Zealander. But facts are stubborn things: Henry is more of a foreigner than Satyanand and white powerbrokers have ripped off Maori for 150 years.

But if these are the facts, then why do some alienated and disaffected youth call for White Power when it seems obvious that all the powerful people are white? Why was there such widespread support for Henry? Why is Harawira seen as such a threat by thousands of working class Pakeha?

The reason is because, despite the myth of



Left: Paul Henry - "real" New Zealander. Right: Anand Satyanand - elitist tool. While it is true that Satyanand was "born here", the very question of being a real New Zealander is dependant on a nationalistic view of the world. Claiming that some people have more right to live in a place than others creates the resentment that shock jocks like Paul Henry and Michael Laws tap into.

biculturalism, NZ politics, culture and nationalism is saturated with racism. Even soft left nationalism like the "born here" t-shirts reflect this. The Asian-bashing skinhead is only taking the sentiment of those shirts to its logical extreme.

Slave trade

Racism as a world view (as opposed to xenophobia, or fear of strangers, common to many primitive societies) was developed to justify the Atlantic slave trade. Plantation owners in the New World, merchants and industrialists in the Old World, and the politicians who represented them needed to reconcile their desire for cheap labour with their Christian ideology which forbade the enslavement of other men. Their solution was to simply designate all black people as sub-human: neatly circumventing any moral

outrage, while ensuring the economic viability of their businesses.

But it wasn't just economic - another advantage to a race-based slave system was the ability to play off poor white labourers against black slaves, to divide and conquer.

The "slaveocracy" in the Americas was a

tiny, extremely wealthy minority surrounded by thousands of people whom it had enslaved, exploited or conquered. Its greatest fear was that slaves and servants would unite against it. In Europe, the businessmen who benefited from slavery were also forcing the peasantry into wage slavery in their "Satanic mills".

Abolitionist and ex-slave Frederick Douglass put it this way: "The slaveholders...by encouraging the enmity of the poor, laboring white man against the Blacks, succeeded in making the said white man almost as much a slave as the Black himself ... Both are plundered, and by the same plunderers." Or, as Douglass also said, "They divided both to conquer each."

Over time, the institution of racism became firmly established--both as a means of legitimizing slavery, but also as a means of dividing poor people against one other.

Racism in Polynesia

This aspect of racism transferred extremely well to Aotearoa. When capitalism first arrived here, it brought the full force of racism with it. On top of the aforementioned tactic of racial divide and conquer, capitalists unleashed two special tools on the workers of Aotearoa.

The first was the "special" wages for Maori workers. This was justified by the so-called Polynesian mode of production. The bosses figured that since Maori were quite able to live off the land without the "help" of the capitalists then any income they got from working was basically a bonus. So they didn't pay them, or paid them 'in kind'.

“The slaveholders...by encouraging the enmity of the poor, laboring white man against the Blacks, succeeded in making the said white man almost as much a slave as the Black himself ... Both are plundered, and by the same plunderers.”

Even when, after long struggle, it finally became standard practice to actually pay Maori labourers, they still used the Polynesian mode of production to justify paying lower wages to Maori workers.

This of course, also harmed the Pakeha workers – any demands for better pay and conditions could always be met by the bosses threatening to replace them all with Maori workers at half the cost.

The other major tool for dividing and conquering was confiscated land.

Any time that the Pakeha workers started getting too uppity, the ruling class could buy them off with lease or sales of small parcels of land.

One of the first examples of this practice was in 1841. In Nelson, the first strike of Pakeha workers for piece work at higher rates took place. The ruling class feared that the labourers would rise and take possession of the fort at Nelson.

At the same time the Maori population, dispossessed of their land and turned into wage workers, also threatened this fort. Unfortunately, the two groups, while both opposed to the ruling class, failed to make common cause, the colonial authorities maintained their power, and the Pakeha workers were bought off by leases or sales of small pieces of land, the very same small pieces of land they had just confiscated from the Maori!

The land became the wedge driven by British imperialism between Pakeha workers and Maori who were expropriated and turned into a “reserve army” of labour. This division between Pakeha and Maori workers remained through most of the nineteenth century: the Pakeha worker, when militant, was offered land, so that he ceased to depend for his livelihood solely on wages.

This offering of land parcels was also common practice with returning servicemen – from the early land wars right through to after World War 2.

It turned out to have multiple benefits for the ruling class. For one thing, it avoided the political, and economic, impact of having large numbers of militant, unemployed, young men just dumped into the cities.

But secondarily, since most land parcels were either on land too marginal, or too small, to be economically viable, most eventually failed, resulting in a steady stream of morally broken, unemployed young men trickling into the cities.

Also, these failed farms could be bought up cheaply by larger landowners expanding their holdings and cementing the place of a tiny agricultural elite in New Zealand.

A legacy of this is the stark split between the rural and urban proletariat and the wealthy farmers in the political landscape of New Zealand.



Few people would consider this “Born Here” shirt racism, but this is exactly the sentiment Henry tapped into when he accused Satyanand of not being a real New Zealander. The asian-bashing skinhead is only taking the sentiment of this shirt to its logical extreme.

Anti-PC backlash

Pretty much the most common outlet for racist ideas at the moment is in the form of “anti-PC” rebellion.

Let’s not mess around here. The very mention of the phrase “politically correct” should be met with scorn. Anybody who is being politically correct is just paying lip-service to the issue but the right wing anti-PC brigade uses these exercises in bullshit as an excuse for wholesale attacks on our rights.

The Treaty of Waitangi settlements are highly publicised and no state function is complete without token gestures of respect for Maoritanga, but the gap in living standards between Maori and Pakeha continues to grow. What is far less well known is the way that Maori were far harder hit by the job losses of the 1980s and 1990s. The Waitangi settlements, drip fed from on high, can’t even begin to cover the loss of regular paid work in manufacturing, forestry, freezing works and rail.

Tokenism, like the Treaty of Waitangi settlements, is a smokescreen that hides the reality of racism and creates resentment that shock jocks like Paul Henry and Michael Laws love to tap into.

Soft nationalism

There is a vein of soft nationalism in New Zealand that is best characterised by the “born here” T-shirts. Few people would consider this racism but this is exactly the sentiment Henry

tapped into when he accused Satyanand of not being a real New Zealander. Shock jocks argue they are either joking or engaging in ‘robust debate’. They quickly pull their heads in after major public outcry. But it is this sort of “boundary pushing” that opens space for real racists and neo-nazis. History has shown that when the acceptable face of racism makes moves like this, the more hardcore elements are soon to follow. Which is why we need to always be vigilant in shutting down things like this, even if it does just seem like a harmless, if tasteless, joke.

However, while we should expose these ‘jokes’, it is important to recognise that the official ideology of the New Zealand state is anti-racist. After all, the National Government is propped up by the Maori Party. “Playing the race card” can be advantageous for individual politicians – eg Winston Peters – but it is destabilising for the system as a whole.

A far more stable solution is to set up a subtle hegemony. A low level of racism that allows John Key to cosy up to the Maori Party, while at the same time half the people locked up in prison are Maori.

But in situations of crisis, it’s division, not stability that the ruling class tries to promote. This can be seen alongside the rise in unemployment in NZ in the early 1990s and most dramatically in Germany in the 1930s. The economic crisis in Europe has led to inspiring resistance but it has also increased the readiness of conservative politicians to invoke racism – as German Chancellor Angela Merkel did when she said multiculturalism had failed because immigrants had failed to integrate.

New Zealand has not yet been plunged into recession as deep as Europe or the USA. If that does happen, we will need to fight not only to defend jobs and services, but also to defeat racism.

Chris Baxter

Marxism and the natural world

A century before the release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Marx and Engels were two of the harshest critics of capitalism's destruction of the environment – yet little is known of their legacy.

Many who see themselves as socialists today feel the need to don the label "eco-socialist", implying that the environment is an issue ignored by Marx and needs to be added on.

The truth is that many of Marx's writings contain a strong environmental critique; his understanding of humans' relationship to nature was a core feature of his analysis. Marx's starting point was seeing that humans, like all living things, have a dialectical relationship to the earth. We come from and are affected by the natural environment, and in turn we impact on and shape the environment around us.

All human societies – from Koori (Aboriginal) societies, to the Mayans, to the Roman Empire, to modern capitalism – have had to interact with the natural world in order to survive. As humans lack many physical attributes that other animals have, such as pointy teeth, claws or wings, it is our brains, hands and our ability to collectively work with other humans that gives us the means to our survival.

Marx stressed the importance of seeing human labour as the source of value. Yet he never removed the natural environment from this equation and polemicised against those who tried to. In his Critique of the Gotha Programme he wrote that, "Nature is just as much the source of use values as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power". And in *The German Ideology* Marx attacked his former mentor Bruno Bauer for discussing "'the antitheses in nature and history', as though they were two separate things".

It is a core human attribute that to survive we must collectively work with and modify the natural world within definable limits. Marx described this natural interaction between humans and the environment as a metabolism, and saw class societies and, in particular, capitalism, as having created a rift in this metabolism.

In Britain and Ireland, one of the most pressing environmental issues of the mid-19th century, when Marx was writing, was the depletion of nutrients from the soil, affecting the ability to grow crops. Taking a keen interest in this, he studied the work of Justus von Liebig, a prominent soil chemist of the time. Liebig made many essential contributions to the field of organic chemistry; but his damning critique of the overuse of fertilisers was always removed from the English translations of his work.

While writing *Capital*, Marx wrote to his collaborator Engels, "I had to plough through the new agricultural chemistry in Germany, in particular Liebig and Schöbein, which is more



important for this matter than all the economists put together." As a result of the long distance transport of food, key soil nutrients, such as potassium, nitrogen and phosphorous, were being transported too. Instead of returning these nutrients back to the soil, human excrement was regularly dumped into the River Thames, thus creating even more environmental impact.

Soil fertility was restored via fertilisation from the robbing of human bones from key battlegrounds like Waterloo and Crimea, and through various wars fought literally over the bird shit in the Guano Islands. Later this led to the development and use of modern synthetic fertilisers whose overuse is now creating even more problems and raising the spectre of reaching peak phosphorous. This was and continues to be a prime example of the rift created in the natural interaction Marx saw between humans and the environment.

Marx and Engels also wrote about the depletion of coal and iron ore reserves, recycling, the "devastating effects" of deforestation, pollution, desertification, industrial wastes, and even climate change as they speculated about deforestation resulting in higher local temperatures.

It is almost unknown today that many figures in the late 19th and early 20th century drew on the environmental work of Marx and Engels. In *The Agrarian Question*, written in 1899, the German socialist Karl Kautsky referred to the dangers of the intensive application of pesticides. In 1901 Lenin wrote of the danger of "substituting artificial for natural manures" and "the irrationality of wasting natural fertilisers and thereby polluting the rivers and the air in suburban and factory districts".

In 1926, the Russian Marxist Vladimir Vernadsky developed the environmental concept of the biosphere, which was to have an important impact on Rachel Carson's concept of ecology in her famous 1962 work *Silent Spring*. Arthur Tansley, a Fabian socialist who followed in the materialist footsteps of Marx, developed the ecosystem concept and is still regarded today as the father of modern ecology.

The defeat of the Russian revolution by the late 1920s, and the rise of Stalinism, dealt a massive blow to this current of thought. By the 1930s, conservationists within Russia were deemed "bourgeois", and the Western left,

dominated by Stalinist politics for decades, largely ignored environmental concerns. It has only been in the past 20 years that Marx's expansive ecological writings have been unearthed by authors such as Paul Burkett and John Bellamy Foster.

Marx's understanding of the metabolic rift present in class societies is now more relevant than ever. With the threat of runaway climate change today, it is common to romanticise pre-industrial societies. But although capitalist society has indeed been the most destructive to our world, but this is not the first time human societies have experienced environmental disaster. In southern Mesopotamia around 2000 BC, over-irrigation and poor drainage saw a rise in the water table and dangerous quantities of salt rising to the topsoil. This caused a disastrous impact on food production, leading to the collapse of the Sumerian civilization.

A contributing factor in the decline of the Roman Empire was the desertification of the grain-growing regions of North Africa due to deforestation and overgrazing. This caused soil erosion so great that this land has still not fully recovered. The Mayans suffered a similar fate around 800 AD. The common thread of these and many other examples is they were all class societies geared towards enriching a small elite, whatever the cost to the land. Scientific ignorance no doubt played a role, but today we have vast scientific knowledge and the same story on a global scale. This logic sees environmental destruction occurring for the blind pursuit of profit by the capitalist class.

But rather than attempting to dominate or control nature, we have to work with it. As Engels explained in his *Dialectics of Nature*:

"At every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly."

The rift that exists between society and nature needs to be repaired by returning to the land what we take from it. A sustainable world can only be built by using our knowledge of nature, the vast technology we have created to harness sustainable energy, and removing the parasites who benefit from the destruction of the planet.

As Marx wrote in the third volume of *Capital*:

"From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, the private property of the earth by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the earth. They are only its possessors, its beneficiaries, and, like *boni patres familias* [good heads of the household], they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition."

Michael Kendelaars

Why we need to get organised

The power of the capitalist class and their loyal representatives in parliament is backed up by nothing less than massive stockpiles of military hardware, an extensive and well-resourced state apparatus and the title deeds for almost every factory, office block and stretch of land within their national boundaries.

Yet despite this, our rulers do not rely solely on this economic and political dominance to ensure that workers turn up to work every day and keep the system running. They also rely heavily on the ideology that legitimises the status quo and their privileged position within it.

This ideology is imparted to us through many and varied means. Children are rewarded for obedience, taught to respect authority and to know their place. When they get older, school teachers enlighten them about the great and important politicians and industrialists who are supposedly responsible for all the advances of modern society, and about the futility, or worse, of efforts by individuals or political movements to seriously challenge the status quo.

Later, the inequalities of the workplace are justified as natural and a product of human nature: there will always be those at the top and those at the bottom, with individual talent the main determinant of where people end up.

Then there is the legal system, which devotes untold hours to prosecuting people over unpaid parking fines, petty theft and disorderly conduct, yet struggles to even admonish those who administer unsafe workplaces, lock up refugees or wage wars in which millions suffer and die.

And the mass media – which convey as much through the assumptions and pro-capitalist prejudices they are imbued with as they do through the purported facts they report – do their best to distract people from or legitimise the profit-driven priorities of those in charge.

All this means that the ideas that justify the status quo – that the rich are entitled to their privilege, inequality is a product of human nature and those who are particularly disadvantaged are responsible for their lot – are more or less taken for granted amongst the majority of people in society. Or as Marx put it, “the ruling ideas in any epoch are the ideas of the ruling class”.

Why then do Marxists insist that working class revolution is possible?

They can because the ideology that backs up the economic dominance of the capitalist class, the legal establishment and the state apparatus is not the only factor impacting on working class consciousness. Many aspects of working class life and experience counteract and contradict the

received wisdom of the capitalist system.

The high degree of cooperation between workers that is necessary for any workplace to function effectively undermines the idea that we are all individuals ready to take advantage of each other at the first opportunity, and helps to break down barriers between workers.

As much as there is a pressure for workers to accept the status quo, there is a countervailing pressure on them to challenge those with power, and to do so in a collective way. The result of this contradiction is that most workers have mixed ideas, some which support capitalism and others which reflect their oppressed position within it. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, writing from his prison cell in fascist Italy, described this phenomenon in considerable detail.

This variance of ideas within the working class is what underpins the argument for a revolutionary party. In order for workers to unite and overthrow capitalism collectively, or even to win higher wages or better conditions at work, there needs to be a high degree of class consciousness. Workers need to be aware of their power, prepared to act to exert it and steered against those determined to undermine them.

The revolutionary party is a tool by which class consciousness can be strengthened, reactionary ideas combated and workers organised to take action. The party aims to involve and organise workers who are at the most class-conscious end of the spectrum in order to influence other workers in a left-wing, class-conscious direction.

By pooling the experiences and ideas of the more radical workers, the arguments they make about the next step in the class struggle can be clearer and more compelling, and their efforts to win these arguments with other workers better coordinated.

This is why newspapers or other types of publications have formed the core of most revolutionary organisations. They not only create a link between socialists in different locations or workplaces, but also put forward a coherent argument to other workers about what might be needed to challenge capitalism and advance the workers' movement at any particular point in time.

Importantly, these arguments come from a revolutionary point of view. Trade union leaders or social democrats can see the need to raise class consciousness at certain times, perhaps in order to win an election or to strengthen their bargaining position with the employers, but they are only prepared to take matters so far.

Revolutionaries by contrast want to follow through to the logical conclusion of working class struggle – the overthrow of the system and its replacement by workers' democratic control over industry and society.

Those on the other side of the class divide are acutely aware of the need for organisation. From outfits like the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation right down to individual industry organisations, the bosses and their representatives in governments around the

world leave nothing to chance.

They campaign against increases to the minimum wage, organise to undermine unions and strike action and lobby governments for more anti-worker employment laws. Given that our side does not have the media empires, the state schooling system or billions of dollars at our disposal, it is even more important that we get organised. The power that comes from workers' numerical superiority vis-à-vis the ruling class, and the fact that they do all the work to keep capitalism ticking over, is meaningless without coordination and organisation in action.

Nor is it enough to be part of struggles around discrete issues without also building up an organisation for the future. Individual struggles, though important, are by their nature temporary. At some point, either demands are met or struggles are defeated. If the experience is left at that, it has only very limited value in the long run.

If instead more people through the process are won to the need to challenge all forms of injustice and oppression, the need to organise in the workplaces to change society and the need for solidarity between oppressed groups against the rich and powerful – i.e. to revolutionary politics – then it has a lasting benefit to both future struggles and to the long-term goal of overthrowing the system in its entirety.

The argument for a revolutionary party is a central one to the revolutionary Marxist movement, as central as the theory of imperialism or Marx's critique of bourgeois economic thought. The party is a crucial weapon in the class struggle, without which revolutionaries and other working class militants are much weakened.

The existence of revolutionary parties, or the lack thereof, has been a significant factor in the victories and defeats of workers' revolutions over the last 150 years. The part played by the Bolshevik Party in the Russian Revolution proved crucial to the success, however short-lived, of the 1917 revolution there. It also vindicated the arguments made by Lenin in the preceding decades about the need to build an organisation on the foundations of clear, revolutionary ideas.

The wave of resistance currently underway in Europe highlights the pressing need for such organisations today, and the difficulty associated with building them in the thick of struggle. Radicalisations can grip masses of people relatively quickly and unexpectedly, and they can just as easily dissipate without leadership and politics to back them up. A larger audience may be opening up for radical ideas, but without sufficient numbers of revolutionaries prepared to argue and fight, it may not be reached.

It is therefore essential to begin the task of getting organised around revolutionary ideas if we are to make the most of the inevitable reaction against the horrors and inequalities of the capitalist system in the future, and to overthrow it for good.

Louise O'Shea (Socialist Alternative)

Game's realism reveals war's horror

Tom Walker looks at the fuss over *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, the fastest-selling video game ever

You can see through US agent Mason's eyes as he is graphically tortured.

You can rotate the controls to look down at the soldier's hands—your hands—strapped to the chair.

"I know when you're lying!" cries the torturer angrily as he electrocutes you, demanding you set out your role in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, where you tried but failed to assassinate Fidel Castro. (Castro outwitted you with a double.)

These are the opening scenes of *Call of Duty: Black Ops*—now the fastest-selling video game of all time.

On launch day on November 9, 5.6 million copies flew off the shelves in the US and Britain alone. At £40 a throw, in cash terms it is outselling the likes of *Harry Potter*, *Avatar*—you name it.

So doesn't that mean millions will right now be playing a game that "glorifies" war—and US imperialism? Isn't that a damning indictment of society?

Not quite. *Black Ops* is somewhat more complicated than that.

As the torture begins to break you, the game's "missions" take place in flashback as Mason describes his experiences—not always, it is suggested, reliably.

At key points the game cuts back to the torture scene, as the interrogator argues with Mason's account of events.

Within this structure, *Black Ops* leads you

through a timeline of US imperialism during the Cold War, from the point of view of a US soldier and later a CIA agent.

After Cuba, you go on briefly to Russia, then into the Vietnam war, where much of the game is set.

Each is recreated with a surprising amount of context. The game even warns at the start that it contains "historical footage which some viewers may find disturbing".

At various points black bars slide across the screen to "redact" parts of the history you just saw. There is no jingoism here—the US does not come out of this looking particularly good.

Of course, games like *Black Ops* can't escape society's pressures to present a one-sided view of war.

Last month EA, developers of the rival *Medal of Honor* series, backed down after a right wing outcry when it was revealed the game let you play as the Taliban and take pot-shots at US soldiers in Afghanistan.

Mischievously, though, the game-makers left all the imagery in and simply renamed the Taliban as the "Opposing Force".

And *Black Ops*' predecessor, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, sparked controversy itself after including a mission where you go undercover as a terrorist, massacring people in an airport.

Under pressure, the developers made the sequence skippable, and argued you could technically complete it without killing a single civilian.

But who the hell is going to do that? It'd be like playing *Grand Theft Auto* by driving politely and obeying all the speed limits.

"Choice" in games is largely an illusion. In *Black Ops*, much like an ordinary soldier, your choices once you're in are to do as you're told or

die, or both.

When they say fire—or don't fire—you'd better obey. If you so much as hesitate, the game is brutal about killing you instantly.

You have to be tactical. If you run around all guns blazing, you'll be dead within seconds. Actions have consequences. Or do they?

After all, in a game, death is never permanent. And most of the time you can shoot as many people as you like with no comeback.

Isn't there a danger in experiencing situations where you, for example, are forced to mow down everything that moves in order to make your escape?

Couldn't it breed empathy with the imperialist side—a sense that they, like the player, "have no choice"?

Perhaps. I can't imagine, however, a young player wanting to join the army after playing *Black Ops*—suffering through these real wars, rendered in incredible detail. *Pac-Man* it ain't.

It's exciting, no doubt. Early in the game you dramatically bust out of a Russian labour camp, suddenly jumping on a motorcycle to drive through the perimeter fence, then from there to a truck to chase a moving train.

That's just plain fun.

But the vast majority of the missions are tense, hurried, chaotic, stressful, and often downright horrific.

War here is rendered with far greater realism than most war movies—even than most news reports. The result, overall, could hardly be accused of "glamourising war".

Like any piece of art—whether book or film, sculpture or painting—it has more to say about its subject than that.

SocialistWorker.org.uk



Thirty years on, Lennon's words still inspire

The commemorative events on the 30th anniversary of John Lennon's death have been mixed, to put it politely. The image of the harmless icon of popular music, at best promoting an anodyne message of peace, has dominated. Frankly, a lot of it is a downright insult to his memory.

John Lennon was a person deeply marked by the hidden injuries of class, and deeply influenced by the worldwide radicalism of the 1960s and early 1970s into which he threw his energies for a whole period.

British leftist Tariq Ali, who knew Lennon in the 1970s, recalled one event that indicated this:

The events in Derry on Bloody Sunday [the massacre of unarmed Irish civil rights demonstrators by the British Army on 30 January 1972], angered him greatly and he subsequently suggested that he wished to march on the next Troops Out demonstration on Ireland, and did so, together with Yoko Ono, wearing Red Mole T-shirts and holding the [Trotskyist newspaper Red Mole] high. Its headline was: "For the IRA, Against British Imperialism."

Along with "Imagine", Lennon wrote some of the most famous songs of the anti-war movement: "Give Peace A Chance" and "Happy Christmas (War Is Over)". He sang at political protests against the Vietnam War, and in support of other radical causes.

Lennon's first book was called *In His Own Write*, and it's appropriate to mark the anniversary of his untimely death with some of his own words. In 1971 Red Mole published a discussion between two of its leading members, Tariq Ali and Robin Blackburn, and John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Lennon sets a certain matter-of-fact working class tone from early on:

I've always been politically minded, you know, and against the status quo. It's pretty basic when you're brought up, like I was, to hate and fear the police as a natural enemy and to despise the army as something that takes everybody away and leaves them dead somewhere.

Lennon had a pretty shrewd appreciation of the meaning of the success that a working class lad from Liverpool had achieved:

I realise in retrospect that it's the same phoney deal they gave the blacks, it was just like they allowed blacks to be runners or boxers or entertainers. That's the choice they allow you – now the outlet is being a pop star, which is really what I'm saying on the album in "Working class hero". As I told Rolling Stone, it's the same people who have the power, the class system didn't change one little bit.

Of course, there are a lot of people walking around with long hair now and some trendy middle class kids in pretty clothes. But nothing changed except that we all dressed up a bit, leaving the same bastards running everything...I found I was having continually to please the sort of people I'd always hated when I was a child. This began to bring me back to reality.

Indicating that his association with the anti-war cause was deliberate rather than accidental, he also said:

I was also pleased when the movement in America took up "Give peace a chance" because I had written it with that in mind really... I felt an obligation even then to write a song that people would sing in the pub or on a demonstration. That is why I would like to compose songs for the revolution now.

Much of the vitriol directed at Lennon for his politics came in the form of racist and sexist hostility to his partner, Yoko Ono. He had no time for these people: "Also when Yoko and I got married, we got terrible racist letters – you know, warning me that she would slit my throat. Those mainly came from army people living in Aldershot. Officers." Instead, he acknowledged the way in which Ono had influenced him as a very positive thing:

And the women are very important too, we can't have a revolution that doesn't involve and liberate women. It's so subtle the way you're taught male superiority. It took me quite a long time to realise that my maleness was cutting off certain areas for Yoko.

She's a red hot liberationist and was quick to show me where I was going wrong, even though it seemed to me that I was just acting naturally. That's why I'm always interested to know how people who claim to be radical treat women.

Diane Fieldes (Socialist Alternative)



Working Class Hero

*As soon as you're born they make you feel small,
By giving you no time instead of it all,
Till the pain is so big you feel nothing at all,
A working class hero is something to be,
A working class hero is something to be.*

*They hurt you at home and they hit you at school,
They hate you if you're clever and they despise a fool,
Till you're so fucking crazy you can't follow their rules,
A working class hero is something to be,
A working class hero is something to be.*

*When they've tortured and scared you for twenty odd years,
Then they expect you to pick a career,
When you can't really function you're so full of fear,
A working class hero is something to be,
A working class hero is something to be.*

*Keep you doped with religion and sex and TV,
And you think you're so clever and classless and free,
But you're still fucking peasants as far as I can see,
A working class hero is something to be,
A working class hero is something to be.*

*There's room at the top they are telling you still,
But first you must learn how to smile as you kill,
If you want to be like the folks on the hill,
A working class hero is something to be,
A working class hero is something to be.*

*If you want to be a hero well just follow me,
If you want to be a hero well just follow me.*



The previous two years have seen an explosion of working class struggle in Europe. The current upsurge began in Greece at the end of 2008, where Athens and other centres were paralysed by mass protests and riots after police shot dead a youth in the left-wing suburb of Exarchia. The protests became a focus for working class discontent in a country where unemployment runs at more than 10% of the working age population (and more than 25% for youth) while the government spends billions on bailing out the banks. The conservative government of Kostas Karamanlis was forced to resign and wave after wave of strikes followed as the new social democratic government attempted to implement austerity measures. Greek workers have continued to resist cuts to the public service, across-the-board wage cuts and attempts to rise the age of retirement and cut old-age pensions by walking off the job in a series of general strikes.

Next the upsurge swung to Spain. Millions protested in Barcelona and other cities for greater autonomy for Catalonia

after the central government stuck out parts of a regional statute for greater autonomy, but this was only a prelude. The reformist Socialist Party government's announcement of pension reform drew tens of thousands out onto the streets in February, resistance to the government's austerity drive building to a one-day general strike on September 29th, in which 10 million workers participated. The strike was timed to coincide with anti-austerity protests across the European Union. 100,000 unionists marched on the European parliament in Brussels, while demonstrators shut down highways in Greece. Further protests against the austerity demanded by the EU and national governments occurred in other countries, including Greece, Ireland, Italy and Latvia. As demonstrators clashed with riot police and forced the closure of stores in Madrid and Barcelona, it became clear that the mood was swinging away from the rhetoric of compromise and 'reasonableness' offered by union leaders.

Continued on Page 10